
Wilson, Thomas C. Review of Crossing the Internet Threshold:
An Instructional Handbook, by Roy Tennant, John Ober, and Anne G.
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In recent years, many books dealing with different aspects of the Internet have been published. The perspective of these books has varied from introductions to specific resources to troubleshooting TCP/IP internetworks. One area that has been generally overlooked is how to train people to use the Internet--that is until the appearance of Crossing the Internet Threshold. In addition to providing the content for training sessions, the authors have produced a framework for trainers, a wealth of resource material (some of which can be used directly without modification), and narrative descriptions of various aspects of the Internet.

This book does not attempt to exhaustively cover Internet resources and tools. Indeed, the authors have been selective in the material they present, and that is one of the book's strengths. The content is limited to what would be challenging, but not overwhelming, to a novice user.

The book is a ready-made training tool, including narrative description, quick reference guides, and exercises that are geared toward both novice and more advanced users. Many of the sections also include cross-references to locations where more information is provided on mentioned topics. That function can be helpful to the self-paced learner and to the trainer attempting to customize a training session.

The authors successfully cover all the areas needed for users with no experience and those users with some experience who wish to grow in understanding. The style is casual, easy, and enjoyable. This book could be used effectively as a workbook accompanying an Internet training session.

The book begins by offering an introduction to internetworking from technological, social/political, and functional perspectives. Naming and addressing conventions, the evolution of network services, and useful definitions are covered to give the user a framework on which to place specific functions and tools.

By far the best advice given for a novice user--or for that matter even an experienced user--is "You can't know everything." The denial of that fact is a fault in many other Internet books. A sensible number of lists, periodicals, organizations, directories, and guides are provided in a "keeping current" section. Attempting to be comprehensive rather than selective in describing where to go for more information on available resources is actually a disservice to new users. The authors have struck a pleasant balance, while remaining honest in presenting the book as a snapshot of the Internet at a particular point in time.

E-mail, remote login (Telnet), and FTP are each given a

chapter. These chapters each follow a uniform format: narrative description, unique relevant parameters, tips for use, and exercises. The e-mail section includes a discussion of lists (both BITNET and Internet), appropriate etiquette for online communication, and command summaries.

The authors also provide fact sheets for a number of popular Internet services, software, tools, and projects (e.g., Archie, Gopher, HYTELNET, SLIP, and USENET News). Each listing is one page long and includes "what," "where," and "for more information" sections. This book provides an enormous number of useful pointers and tips, especially for new users. In addition, there are several ready-made overhead masters and discussion questions provided at the end of the book.

It is difficult to find fault with the book. The main limitation is its emphasis on the UNIX flavor of Internet services and functionality. The authors are open about this focus. It is both a strength and a weakness. Having this boundary permits the authors to focus more on real Internet issues without being distracted by describing variant forms of commands (e.g., FTP). But for the novice user who may not have access to a UNIX account or local support to translate commands into the "OS du jour," such a focus could be disheartening. In addition, the LISTSERV command summary section would benefit from a few more examples. It is a bit terse.

If you have been volunteered as an Internet trainer or have actually chosen that august task, this book is a wonderful resource for you. The focus is clearly geared for librarians, but could be easily extended to other user groups. The content and format are superb and appropriate. Tennant, Ober, and Lipow have provided a much needed resource for the Internet community. Readers will hope that the authors will update this resource over time.

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Further Information About the Reviewed Work

Tennant, Roy, John Ober, and Anne G. Lipow. Crossing the Internet Threshold: An Instructional Handbook. Berkeley: Library Solutions Press, 1993. ISBN 1-882208-01-3. Price: \$45.00.

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